Underground Railroad in Livingston County

By

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Livingston County Historical Society

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The Underground Railroad

- A network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century.

- Enslaved African Americans used it primarily to escape into free states and from there to Canada.

- Mainly the work of free African Americans, was assisted by abolitionists and others sympathetic to the cause of the escapees.

- The enslaved people who risked capture and those who aided them are also collectively referred to as the passengers and conductors of the "Underground Railroad."

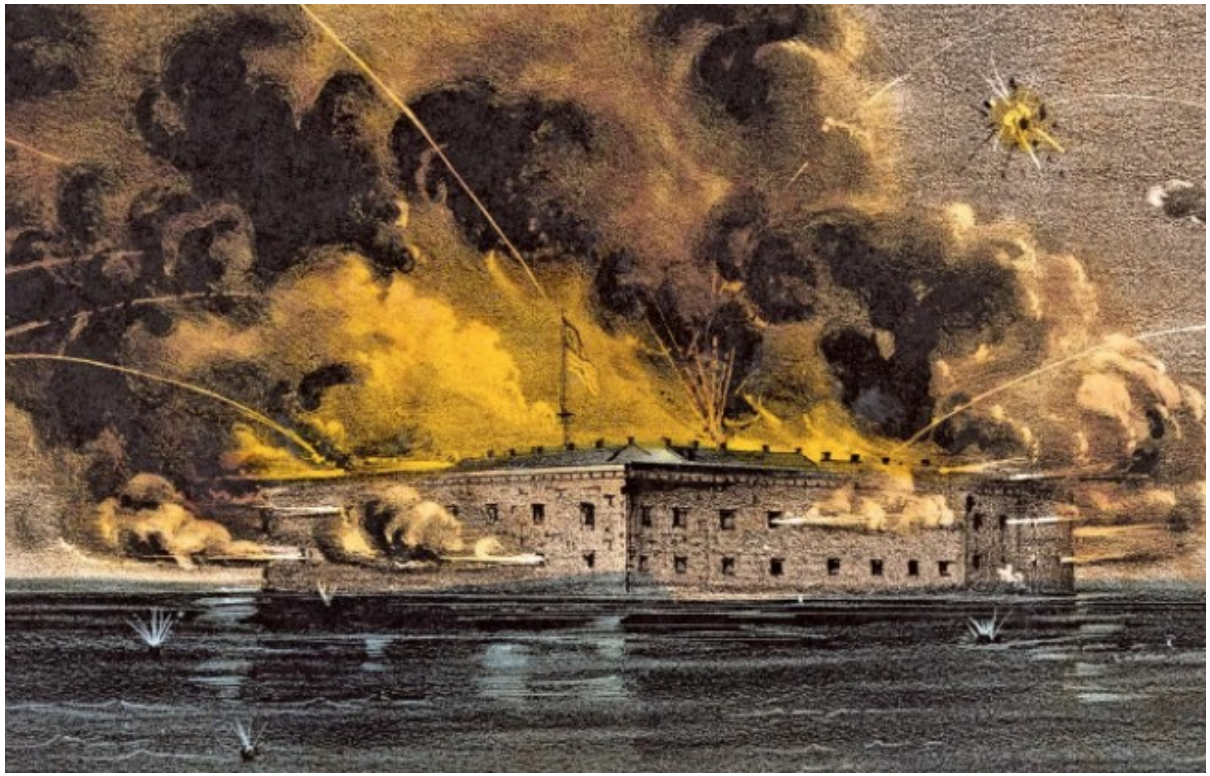
How Many Slaves in the South Prior to the Civil War?

4 Million

- The 1860 census recorded 3,953,760 enslaved people in the United States, which is considered the final count of slaves before the Civil War.

When did the Civil War Start?

- On April 12, 1861 – Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter, South Carolina



Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- The Underground Railroad began in about 1840.

- It ran north and grew steadily until President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

- The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

- One estimate suggests that, by 1850, approximately 100,000 enslaved people had escaped to freedom via the network.

100K/4 Million = 2.5%

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

THE

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

FROM

SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

BY

WILBUR H. SIEBERT

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF EUROPEAN HISTORY
IN OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

ALBERT BUSHNELL HART

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.
1898

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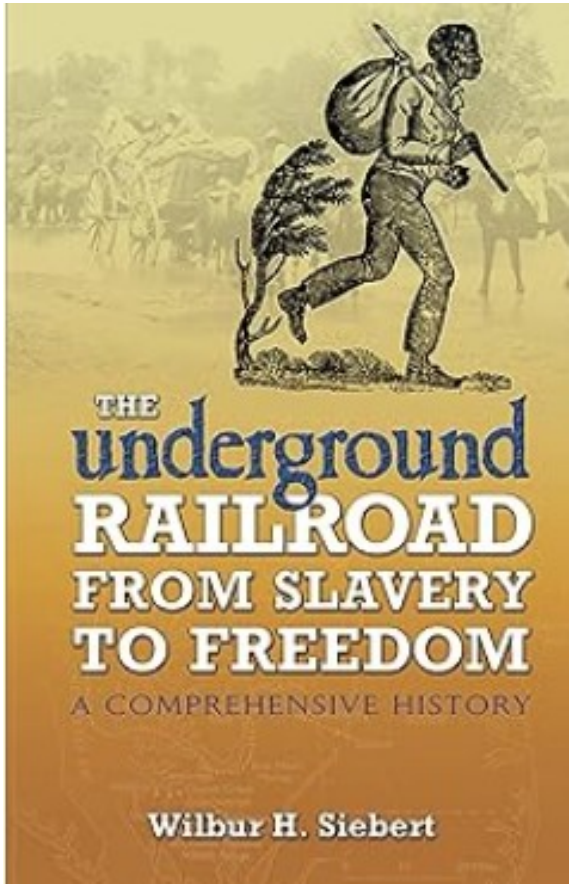
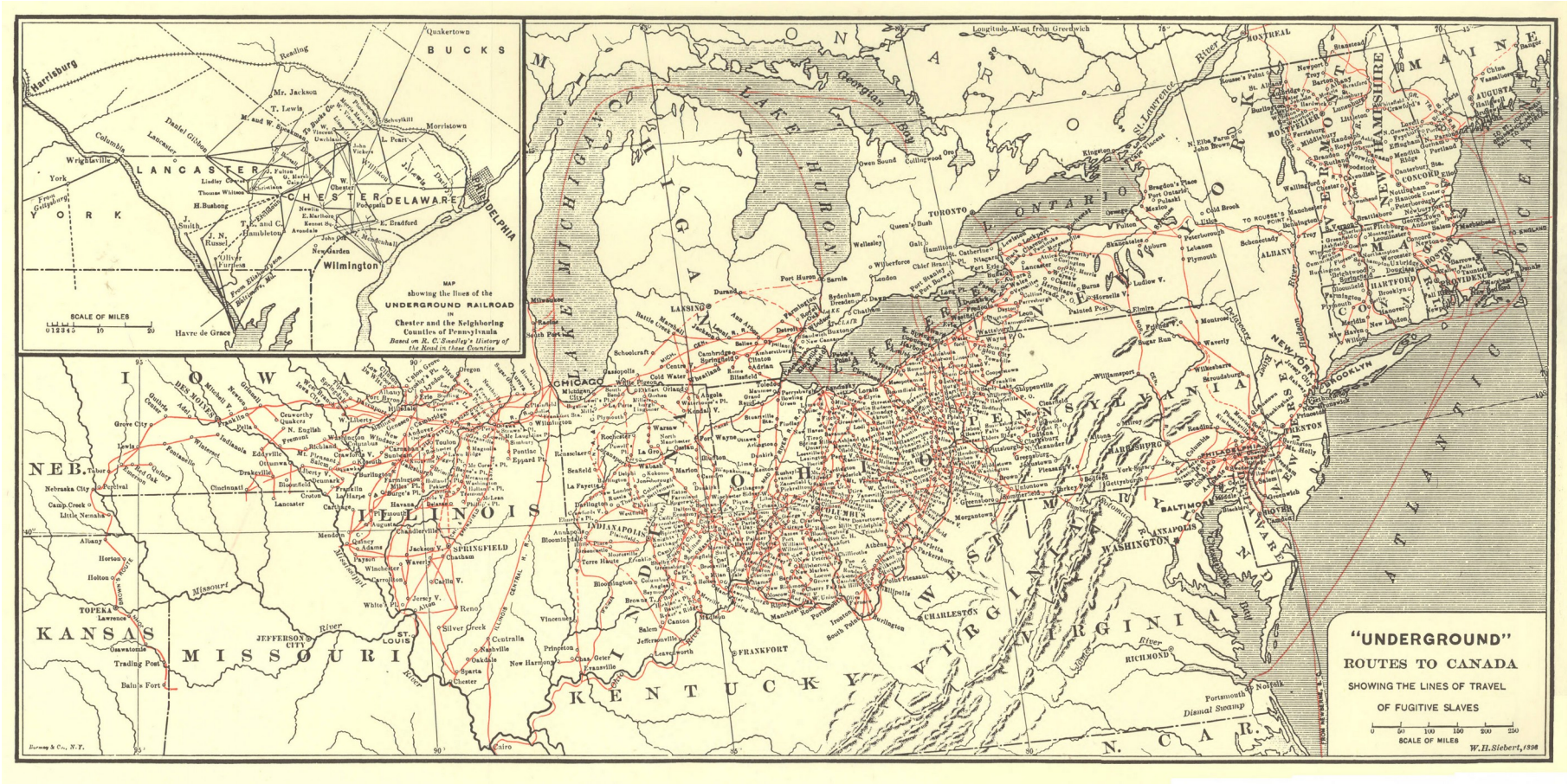
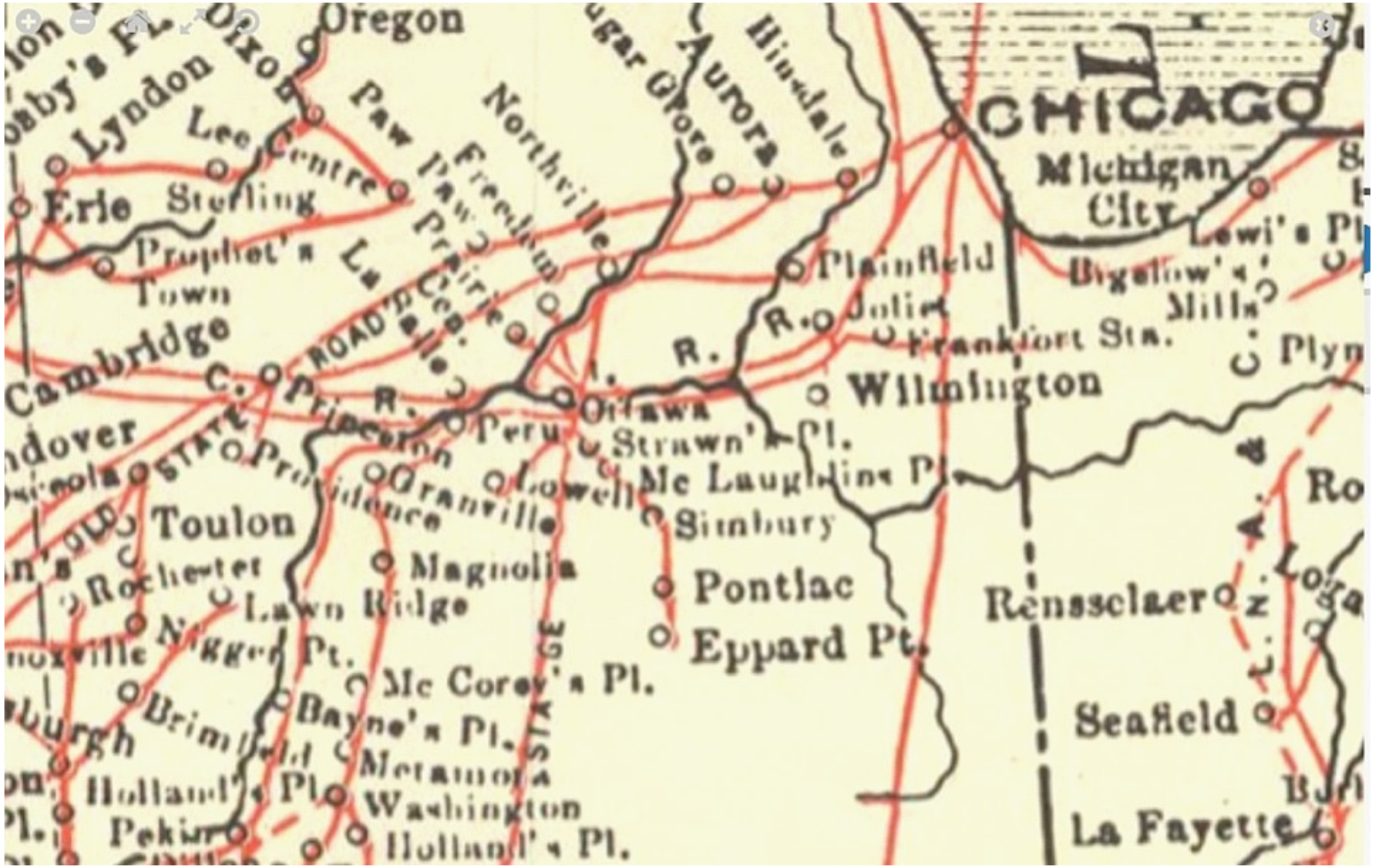


- Best book on Underground RR
- Written in 1898, PDF or buy new

Underground Railroad in Livingston County


"UNDERGROUND"
ROUTES TO CANADA
SHOWING THE LINES OF TRAVEL
OF FUGITIVE SLAVES
SCALE OF MILES
W.H.Siebert,1898
MAP
showing the lines of the
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
IN
Chester and the Neighboring
Counties of Pennsylvania
Based on R. C. Smedley's History of
the Road in these Counties
SCALE OF MILES
Harrisburg
Reading
Quakertown
BUCKS
LANCASTER
CHESTER
DELAWARE
PHILADELPHIA
YORK
Wilmington
Havre de Grace
Mr. Jackson
T. Lewis
Daniel Gibbons
Morristown
Wrightsville
Columbia
Lancaster
York
H.Bushong
J. Smith
J.N. Russel
Oliver Furniss
New Garden
Kennet Sq.
Avondale
Newtown
E.Marlboro
R. Bradford
Mendenhall
John Pim
Thomas Whitson
Lindley Coates
Pocopson
W. Chester
Jacob Vickers
Jesse Lewis
Daniel Gibbons
Thos. and C. Hambleton
Wm. Dickinson
Longitude West from Greenwich
LAKE MICHIGAN
LAKE HURON
LAKE ONTARIO
LAKE ERIE
Georgian Bay
Owen Sound
Collingwood
TORONTO
Queen's Bush
Wellesley
Galt
Hamilton
St. Catherines
Niagara
Fort Erie
Port Stanley
Port Burwell
Port Huron
Sarnia
London
Dresden
Dunwich
Chatham
Detroit
Windsor
Milwaukee
Racine
South Port
Raisin
Monroe
Toledo
Sandusky
Lorain
Elyria
Cleveland
Painesville
Ashtabula
Conneaut
Erie
Girard
Fairview
Northeast
Westfield
Dunkirk
Fredonia
Silver Creek
Buffalo
Tonawanda
Lockport
Rochester
Brighton
Pittsford
Victor
Canandaigua
Geneva
Seneca Falls
Auburn
Skaneateles
Syracuse
Oswego
Fulton
Pulaski
Watertown
Sackets Harbor
Ellisburg
Adams
Rossie
Antwerp
Theresa
Redwood
Alexandria Bay
Clayton
Cape Vincent
Gananoque
Kingston
Belleville
Cobourg
Port Hope
Bowmanville
Oshawa
Whitby
Toronto
Brantford
Paris
Woodstock
Ingersoll
Tillsonburg
Simcoe
Vittoria
Port Dover
Hagersville
Dunnville
Port Colborne
Welland
St. Catharines
Grimsby
Hamilton
Dundas
Waterdown
Guelph
Elora
Fergus
Orangeville
Shelburne
Owen Sound
Meaford
Collingwood
Barrie
Orillia
Lindsay
Peterborough
Port Hope
Cobourg
Brighton
Trenton
Belleville
Napanee
Kingston
Gananoque
Brockville
Prescott
Cornwall
Lancaster
Alexandria
Vankleek Hill
Hawkesbury
Grenville
Montreal
Longueuil
Chambly
St. Johns
Rouse's Point
Champlain
Plattsburg
Keeseville
Port Kent
Burlington
Winooski
Essex Junction
Bellows Falls
Brattleboro
Keene
Walpole
Bellows Falls
Windsor
Claremont
Newport
Sunapee
Concord
Manchester
Nashua
Lowell
Lawrence
Andover
Haverhill
Newburyport
Salisbury
Amesbury
Portsmouth
Dover
Rochester
Alton
Wolfeboro
Laconia
Meredith
Plymouth
Lebanon
Hanover
Norwich
Woodstock
Bethel
Rutland
Middlebury
Vergennes
Burlington
Swanton
St. Albans
Richford
Stanstead
Sherbrooke
Lennoxville
Danville
Windsor
Drummondville
Nicolet
Three Rivers
Berthier
Joliette
Terrebonne
Lachine
Beauharnois
Valleyfield
Huntingdon
Chateauguay
Caughnawaga
Laprairie
St. Lawrence River
Ottawa River
Richelieu River
Connecticut River
Merrimack River
Androscoggin River
Kennebec River
Penobscot River
Saco River
Portland
Augusta
Bangor
Calais
St. Andrews
St. Stephen
Woodstock
Fredericton
Moncton
Amherst
Pictou
New Glasgow
Truro
Halifax
Windsor
Yarmouth
Digby
Annapolis
Kentville
Wolfville
Shubenacadie
Musquodoboit
Sackville
Dorchester
Shediac
Chatham
Newcastle
Bathurst
Campbellton
Dalhousie
Edmundston
Grand Falls
Woodstock
Houlton
Presque Isle
Caribou
Fort Fairfield
Van Buren
Madawaska
Rivière du Loup
Trois Pistoles
Rimouski
Metis
Matane
Mont Joli
Campbellton
Gaspé
Percé
New Carlisle
Bonaventure
Paspebiac
Port Daniel
Carleton
Cape Cove
Grand River
Port Daniel
Maria
Hopetown
Percé
Gaspé
Cape Gaspé
Gulf of St. Lawrence
Prince Edward Island
Charlottetown
Summerside
Tignish
Souris
Georgetown
Pictou
Antigonish
Guysborough
Canso
Sydney
Glace Bay
Louisburg
Cape Breton Island
Newfoundland
St. John's
Harbor Grace
Carbonear
Placentia
Argentia
Trepassey
Cape Race
Port aux Basques
Channel
Bay of Fundy
Grand Manan
Campobello
Eastport
Lubec
Machias
Jonesport
Millbridge
Ellsworth
Bucksport
Belfast
Rockland
Thomaston
Wiscasset
Bath
Brunswick
Lewiston
Auburn
Gardiner
Augusta
Waterville
Skowhegan
Bingham
Dover
Foxcroft
Guilford
Milo
Brownville
Greenville
Moosehead Lake
Rangeley
Farmington
Wilton
Jay
Livermore Falls
Rumford
Bethel
Fryeburg
North Conway
Berlin
Gorham
Lancaster
Littleton
Woodsville
Wells River
Barre
Montpelier
Waterbury
Stowe
Morrisville
Hyde Park
Johnson
Enosburg Falls
Richford
Newport
Derby Line
Stanstead
Sherbrooke
Magog
Coaticook
Lennoxville
Cowansville
Granby
Farnham
Waterloo
Sweetsburg
Frelighsburg
Philipsburg
Stanbridge East
Bedford
Knowlton
Lake Memphremagog
Lake Champlain
Lake George
Saratoga
Schuylerville
Fort Edward
Glens Falls
Whitehall
Granville
Hudson Falls
Saratoga Springs
Ballston Spa
Schenectady
Albany
Troy
Rensselaer
Hudson
Catskill
Kingston
Poughkeepsie
Newburgh
Peekskill
Yonkers
New York
Brooklyn
Jersey City
Newark
Elizabeth
Perth Amboy
Trenton
Princeton
New Brunswick
Somerville
Flemington
Phillipsburg
Easton
Bethlehem
Allentown
Reading
Pottsville
Shamokin
Sunbury
Lewisburg
Williamsport
Lock Haven
Clearfield
Philipsburg
Bellefonte
Tyrone
Altoona
Hollidaysburg
Huntingdon
Mount Union
Lewistown
Mifflin
Newport
Duncannon
Carlisle
Shippensburg
Chambersburg
Greencastle
Hagerstown
Frederick
Gettysburg
York
Lancaster
Columbia
Middletown
Harrisburg
Hummelstown
Lebanon
Pottstown
Norristown
Germantown
Chestnut Hill
Bryn Mawr
Wayne
Paoli
Coatesville
West Chester
Kennett Square
Oxford
Elkton
Newark
Wilmington
Delaware City
New Castle
Dover
Milford
Georgetown
Lewes
Rehoboth
Salisbury
Pocomoke City
Snow Hill
Berlin
Ocean City
Chincoteague
Accomac
Onancock
Cape Charles
Eastville
Exmore
Nassawadox
Cape Henry
Virginia Beach
Norfolk
Portsmouth
Suffolk
Smithfield
Isle of Wight
Franklin
Windsor
Courtland
Emporia
Petersburg
Hopewell
City Point
Chesterfield
Richmond
Manchester
Bermuda Hundred
Fredericksburg
Aquia
Dumfries
Quantico
Occoquan
Alexandria
Arlington
Falls Church
Fairfax
Centreville
Manassas
Gainesville
Haymarket
Warrenton
Culpeper
Orange
Gordonsville
Charlottesville
Scottsville
Lynchburg
Amherst
Bedford
Liberty
Salem
Roanoke
Christiansburg
Blacksburg
Radford
Pulaski
Wytheville
Marion
Abingdon
Bristol
Kingsport
Rogersville
Greeneville
Jonesborough
Johnson City
Elizabethton
Mountain City
Boone
Blowing Rock
Lenoir
Morganton
Hickory
Newton
Statesville
Mooresville
Salisbury
Concord
Kannapolis
Gastonia
Shelby
Rutherfordton
Asheville
Hendersonville
Brevard
Waynesville
Sylva
Bryson City
Franklin
Murphy
Andrews
Robbinsville
Tapoco
Fontana Dam
Cherokee
Maggie Valley
Canton
Hazelwood
Waynesville
Clyde
Sylva
Dillsboro
Whittier
Cherokee
Bryson City
Fontana Village
Fontana Dam
Tapoco
Robbinsville
Andrews
Murphy
Hayesville
Clayton
Dillard
Mountain City
Rabun Gap
Clarkesville
Cornelia
Toccoa
Lavonia
Hartwell
Anderson
Greenville
Spartanburg
Union
Gaffney
Kings Mountain
Shelby
Rutherfordton
Forest City
Spindale

Underground Railroad in Livingston County



- Did not research 2 routes to east and west of Pontiac

Sources to Search for more info on the Pontiac Route

- 1898 Professor Siebert's book has map of route from Weston to Ottawa
- 1878 Livingston County History book
- 1879 McLean County history book
- 1908 Ford County history book – no info on eastern route
- 1977 Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars by Alma Lewis James, Fairbury Historian
- Sentinel & Daily Leader (some articles)
- Pantagraph (no articles before 1865 on Liv. County)

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Most of the Underground Railroad routes in Illinois were in the western half of Illinois and followed the Mississippi River.

- There was only one major route in east-central Illinois, many miles east of Livingston County.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- The first settler family in Livingston County was Valentine Darnall in 1830.

- Livingston County was not formed until 1837. Livingston County was one of the last counties in Illinois to be settled.

- The land was swampy, and no railroads existed to ship agricultural supplies or products.

- In 1850, Congress passed a new Script Act law, which gave free land to primarily veterans of the War of 1812.

- This new law created a rush of settlers into Livingston County between 1853 and 1860. By 1860, all the farmland in the county was claimed by settlers.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

•Because there were almost no farmers living in Livingston County between 1830 and 1853, it is not surprising there were no major Underground Railroad routes in the county.

•Alma Lewis James was a Fairbury Historian who wrote the book ***Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars***.

Alma Lewis James

•In her book, she claimed there was an underground railroad route from Strawn to Odell.

•The path included a stop-over at a cabin on the Fugate farm northeast of Fairbury on the Vermilion River.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Alma reported there was one enslaved person known to be buried by the river bank.

- She said no other information about this route was available because all the activities were secret and done at night.

- Unfortunately, Alma cited no reference material sources for her story.

- A Fugate descendant said that as a young boy, relatives would point out about where the cabin and burial was thought to be.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

An integrated sack race on East Main Street for both participants and spectators. At one time, about 100 blacks lived in and near Fairbury. They attended the same schools as whites but went to different Methodist and Baptist churches and Sunday schools. Most came from Mike Sullivant's farm in Fayette Township. Fairbury's best-known black was Richard "Side Hill Dick" Quarles, who became the first Negro to vote in Fairbury, in an 1870 township election. His voting was witnessed by a large crowd in a circus atmosphere. Fairbury's blacks staged Possum Suppers and concerts to raise money for their churches. There was also a Colored Brass Band. Fairbury had a station on the Underground Railway to help free slaves. It was a little cabin in the woods near the river. The Railway portion which concerned Fairbury ran between Strawn and Odell.

Fairbury Blade newspaper

Larger print

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

An integrated sack race on East Main Street for both participants and spectators. At one time, about 100 blacks lived in and near Fairbury. They attended the same schools as whites but went to different Methodist and Baptist churches and Sunday schools. Most came from Mike Sullivant's farm in Fayette Township. Fairbury's best-known black was Richard "Side Hill Dick" Quarles, who became the first Negro to vote in Fairbury, in an 1870 township election. His voting was witnessed by a large crowd in a circus atmosphere. Fairbury's blacks staged Possum Suppers and concerts to raise money for their churches. There was also a Colored Brass Band. Fairbury had a station on the Underground Railway to help free slaves. It was a little cabin in the woods near the river. The Railway portion which concerned Fairbury ran between Strawn and Odell.

- No evidence could be found to document the Strawn to Odell route.

The Fugitive Slave Act

- Passed on September 18, 1850 by Congress.

- The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was part of the Compromise of 1850.

- The act required that slaves be returned to their owners, even if they were in a free state.

- The act also made the federal government responsible for finding, returning, and trying escaped slaves.

- A slave found in Livingston County, legally was supposed to be returned to his/her master in the South.

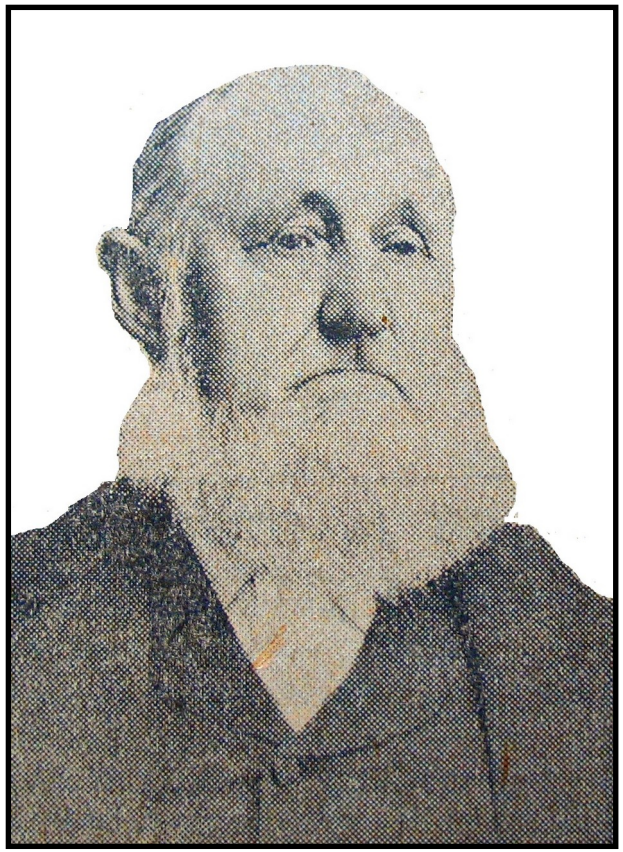
Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Dr. C. B. Ostrander was one of the first doctors in Livingston County.

- He lived between Fairbury and McDowell.

- The 1888 Livingston County history book recounts that Dr. Ostrander was also a staunch Abolitionist.

- One day, he came into Fairbury and found a fugitive slave chained to the floor of a two-story building.



Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- This fugitive slave was going to be returned to his master in Virginia.

- The Doctor cut the shackles from the fugitive using a crowbar, sledgehammer, and chisel.

- He loaded the fugitive into a horse-drawn buggy and delivered him to Dr. C. V. Dyer in Chicago.

- Ostrander also gave the fugitive $10 in cash.
  ($10 in 1850 = $372 in today's dollars)

- The fugitive was placed on Captain Blake's steamer "Illinois." The steamer transported him to freedom in Maiden, Canada.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- The 1878 Livingston County history book contains a lot of information about several men in Pontiac who were strong Abolitionists and participated in the Underground Railroad route that ran from Eppards Point Township west of Fairbury to Pontiac and then on to Ottawa.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- **These men included:**
  - -Owen Lovejoy
  - -James H. Collins
  - -Ichabod Codling
  - -Chauncey Cook
  - -Otis Richardson
  - -John Hossack
  - -William B. Fyfe
  - -William Strawn
  - -Otis Whaley
  - -George and Xenophon Richards
  - -Moses Rumery
  - -C. P. Pagent
  - -Dr. H. H. Hinman.

Descendants still living in Livingston County?

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- One of the Abolitionist leaders in the Pontiac area was **William B. Fyfe** (1822-1910).

- He was born and raised in Scotland.

- He came to Canada in 1844 and worked in the mercantile business.

- In 1849, he moved to Ottawa, Illinois.

- While in Ottawa, he was a Conductor and operated a safe house "Depot" for the Underground Railroad.

- Mr. Fyfe became a lawyer.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- In 1856, Mr. Fyfe moved to Livingston County and set up a store in New Michigan for two years.

- New Michigan was north of Pontiac.

- The new railroads did not go through New Michigan, so it became a ghost town.

- Mr. Fyfe became a farmer.

- In 1862, he moved to Pontiac and entered the law firm of E. A. Harding.

- That same year, he enlisted in the Union Army and fought in the Civil War.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Mr. Fyfe's experience as a conductor and depot operator in Ottawa likely led to the formation of an underground railroad line originating west of Fairbury at the Otis Richardson Farm.

- The line ran north to Pontiac and then to Ottawa in LaSalle County.

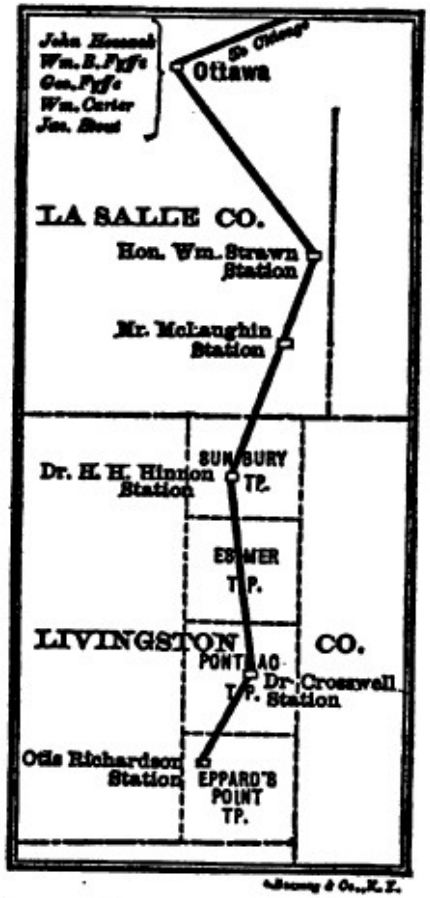
Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- For his 1898 book on the Underground Railroad, Professor Siebert obtained a hand-drawn map of the stretch of the Underground Railroad from west of Fairbury up to Ottawa from William B. Fyfe.

- Mr. Fyfe died in 1910, so he likely provided the map to Professor Siebert for his 1898 book.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

From a drawing made by Mr. W. B. Fyffe, an old-time station-agent of Ottawa, Illinois, the accompanying chart of a line of escape through Livingston and La Salle counties in Illinois is reproduced. The portion of the trail represented is about forty miles in length, and is remarkable for the directness of its course and the absence of interlacing lines. At Ottawa, the northernmost station shown, the trail loses these two characteristics, for it makes there a sharp turn on its way to the terminus, Chicago, and at Ottawa also it makes a junction with several other lines from the western part of the state.[1]



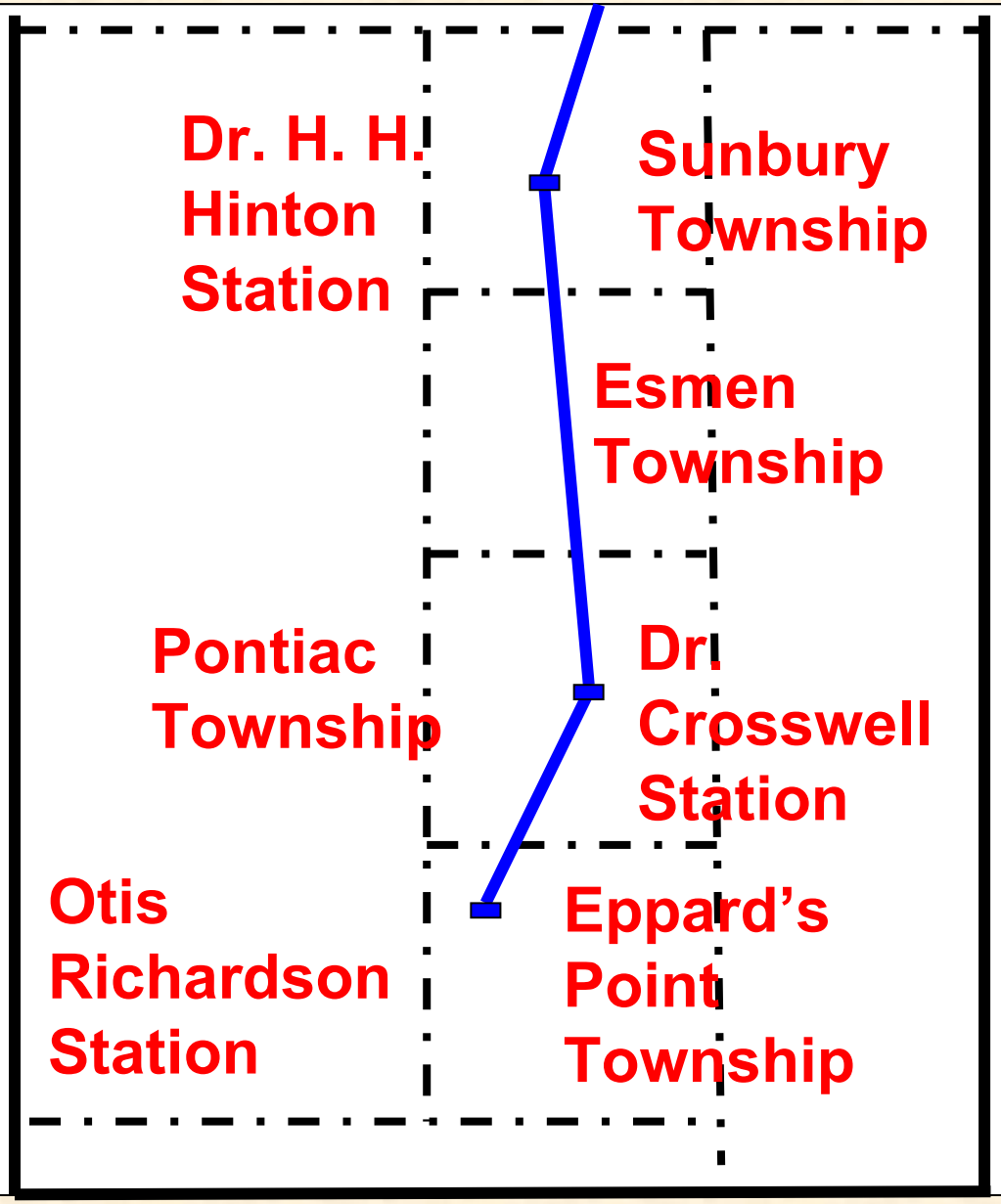
SIMPLE ROUTE THROUGH LIVINGSTON AND LA SALLE COUNTIES, ILLINOIS.

Drawn by William B. Fyffe.

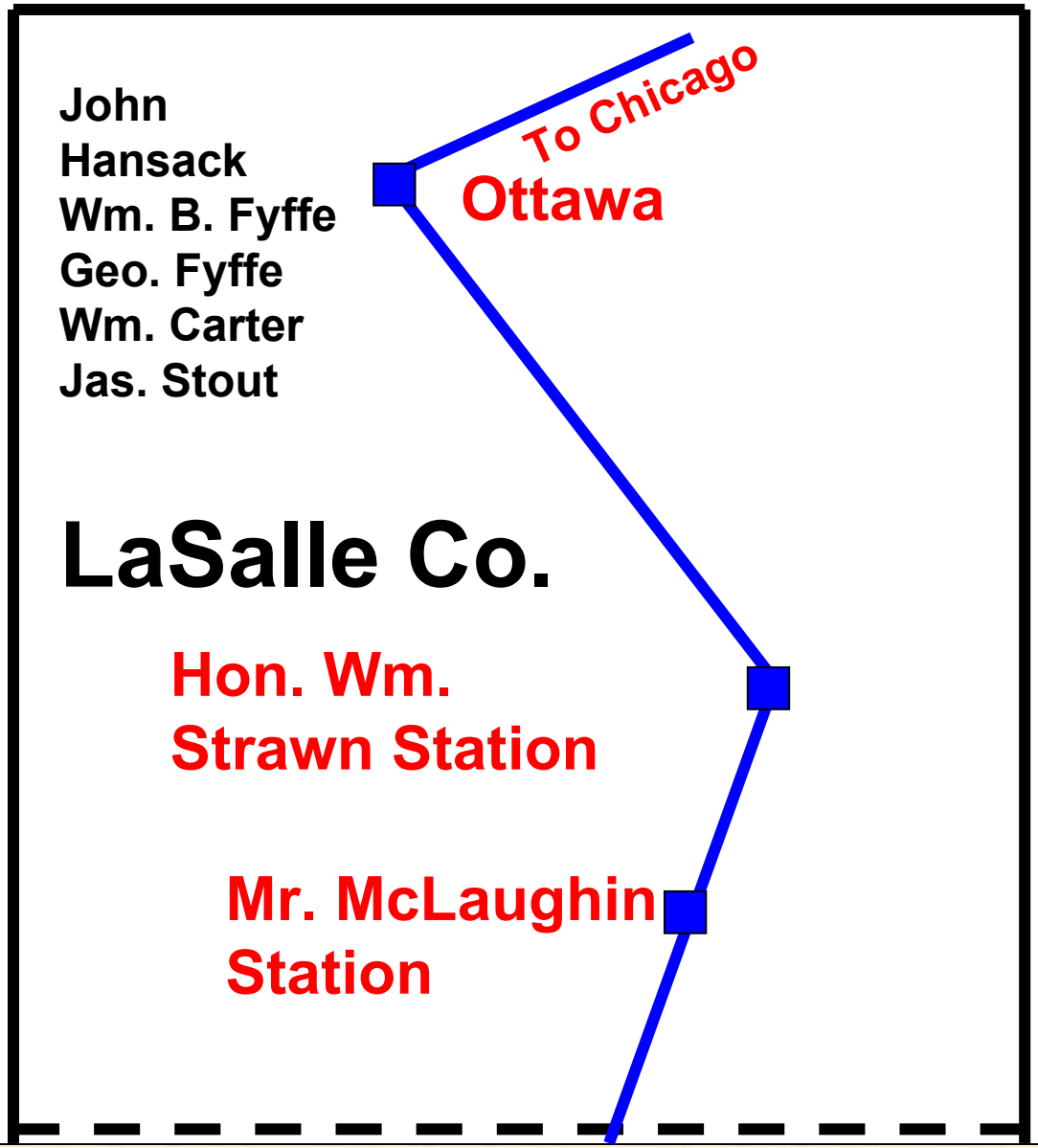
From Professor Siebert's book

Map only

Underground Railroad in Livingston County



Underground Railroad in Livingston County

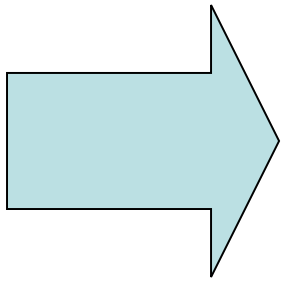


Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Unfortunately, Mr. Fyfe's map extends only as far south as Otis Richardson's farm.

- South of Otis Richardson's farm would mark the end of Livingston County and the start of McLean County.

Check McLean County History Book



Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- The 1879 McLean County history book references the Underground Railroad having a station in Mount Hope Township.

- This township is southwest of Bloomington.

- Mr. John Moss had a secret compartment in his house for hiding slave fugitives.

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Mr. Moss or one of his friends would guide the fugitives to one of two destinations.

- The first destination was Aunt Polly's Mahan's station at Lexington.

- If the weather was excellent, the more extended alternative destination was the Abolitionists in New Michigan, operated by Charles Pagent and his supporters in Livingston County.

Emancipation Proclamation

- The Emancipation Proclamation was an executive order issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 that declared enslaved people in rebellious states to be free.

- It was a key step towards abolishing slavery, but it didn't abolish slavery permanently

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Because of the Emancipation Proclamation, The Underground Railroad ceased operations around 1863

- This work continued above ground as part of the Union's efforts against the Confederacy

13th Amendment

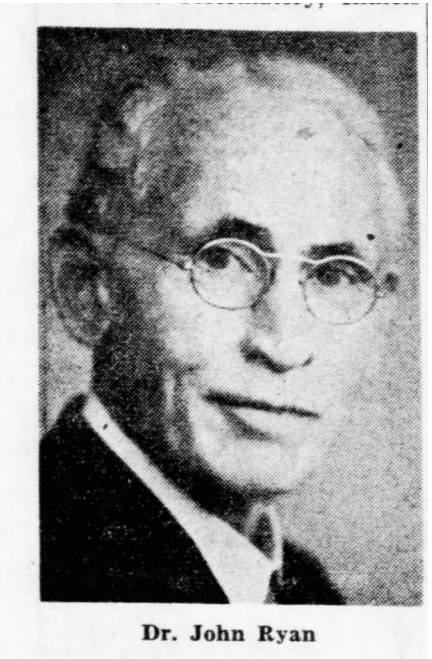
The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

13th Amendment Timeline

April 8, 1864: The Senate passed the 13th Amendment
January 31, 1865: The House of Representatives passed the 13th Amendment with a vote of 119–56
February 1, 1865: President Abraham Lincoln approved the joint resolution of Congress that submitted the 13th Amendment to the states for ratification
April 9, 1865: General Lee surrendered to General Grant
April 15, 1865. President Lincoln assassinated.
December 6, 1865: The required 27 of the then 36 states ratified the 13th Amendment
December 18, 1865: The 13th Amendment was proclaimed

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

- Dr. John Ryan (1860-1948)
- Minister – Chaplain of Boy's Reformatory in Pontiac
- President of Livingston County Historical Society
- Did research on Underground Railroad for Illinois State Historical Society in 1913
- Gave many talks on Underground Railroad
  -gave talks to Lexington students
  (have not found any of his research)



Dr. John Ryan

Closing Thoughts

- The issue of whether or not to return fugitive enslaved people to their owners in the South in the 1840 to 1863 era did have an impact on Fairbury and Livingston County citizens.

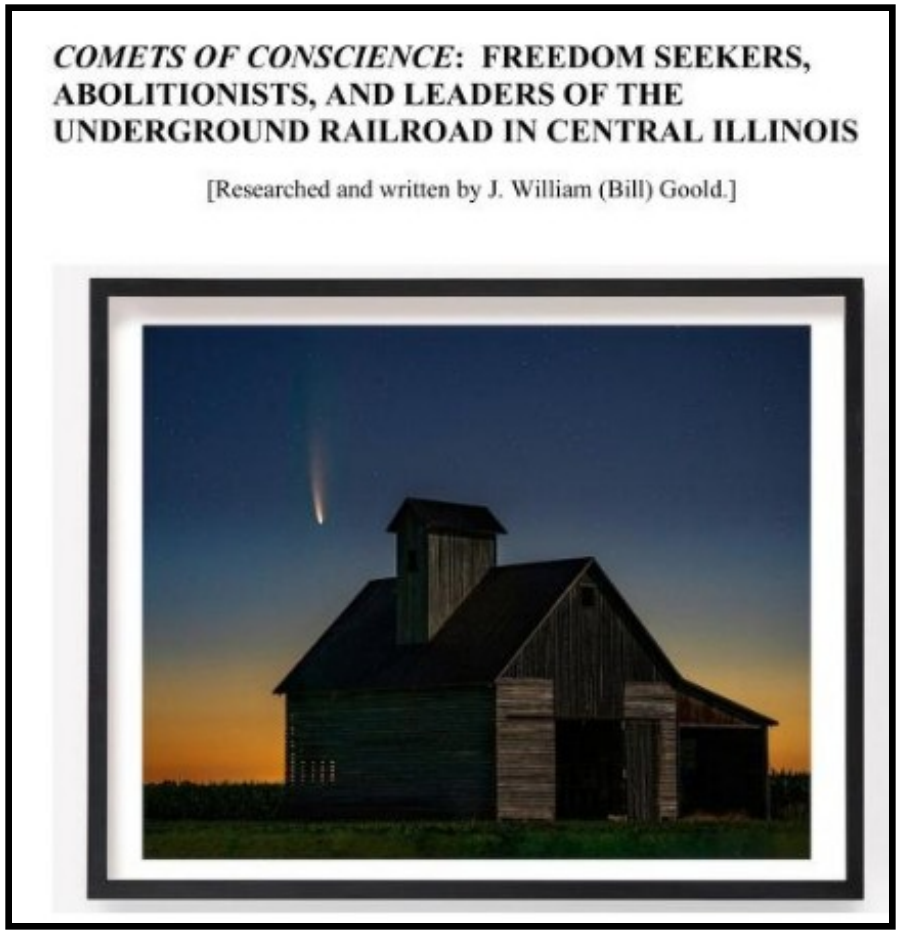
- A branch of the Underground Railroad running from west of Fairbury and through Pontiac on to Ottawa did help many fugitive enslaved people obtain their freedom in Canada.

- Maybe someday Dr. Ryan's research results will be found.

Additional Information

- J. William (Bill) Goold, Fairbury native, last week released his unpublished manuscript about Underground Railroad in Central Illinois

- ***COMETS OF CONSCIENCE: FREEDOM SEEKERS, ABOLITIONISTS, AND LEADERS OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS***


COMETS OF CONSCIENCE: FREEDOM SEEKERS, ABOLITIONISTS, AND LEADERS OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS
[Researched and written by J. William (Bill) Goold.]

Additional Information

- PDF copy of Unpublished Manuscript available from Livingston County Historical Society website LivCHS.org under the Resources Tab
- https://tinyurl.com/5x9xfnd6
- Pontiac Library is making a paper copy for the History Room
- I have not had time to review the 246 pages in this Unpublished Manuscript before preparing this presentation

Underground Railroad Exhibit at the Pontiac Library

- Started January 31
- Ends March 5, 2025
- Very interesting displays and videos

How to contact me

- You can reach me:

  Facebook PM message

  DaleMaley@Gmail.com

  815-692-6633 (landline with answering machine)

  I don't do Text messages.

Questions?